

Georgi Kitov

THRACIAN CULT CENTER NEAR STAROSSEL



‘Thank you for your commitment and your self-confidence that you have made a great discovery. I wish sincerely that you had find out the tomb of the legendary Sitalkes. ...

Starossel can turn into a European capital of the cultural tourism!’

Petar Stoyanov - President of the Republic of Bulgaria

September 29, 2000. Starossel.

‘We are surprised at seeing such a breath-taking and majestic monument, which is a matter of honor for both the constructors - the ancient Thracians, and for the Bulgarian archaeology.’

H.M. Margarete II, Queen of Denmark, and Prince Henrich

October 19, 2000. Starossel.

‘We lived long enough to see the majesty of the temples from the ancient Thracian lands.’

Prof. Margarita Tacheva

September 9, 2000. Starossel.

‘... the excavations in Starossel will be acknowledged to be the world greatest archaeological discovery for the year... Starossel threw new light on the Thracian classical antiquity. In terms of history the monument is a first-class source for the history of the Balkans from the second half of the 1st millennium BC.’

Lolita Nikolova, Ph.D.

August 25, 2000.

‘I do not believe there will be anyone to contest the success of the Thracian Expedition for Tumular Investigations (TEMP) under the direction of Dr. Georgi Kitov, who managed to save dozens of monuments of the Thracian culture from the widely-spread attacks of the treasure-hunters.’

Konstantin Boshnakov, Ph.D. Thracian antiquity. S. 2000. Page 126.

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Georgi Kitov

THRACIAN CULT
CENTER NEAR
STAROSSSEL

Second expanded
and revised edition

Slavena
2003 г.

© Georgi Kitov Ph. D., author
Publishing house “SLAVENA”
ISBN 954-579-184-5

THRACIAN CULT CENTER NEAR STAROSSEL

In early 2000 by means of a letter, that took a long time to reach me, I was informed that in Starossel, Hissar region, 'treasure-hunters discovered presumably the largest tomb constructed with chipped stones in the biggest tumulus located near the village'. 'The treasure-hunters mask the entry in the daytime and work in the nights.' I have been accustomed to hearing about such 'epoch-making' discoveries, which are almost always disproved after the check up on the site. I had small causes to pay attention to the letter as the winter was at its height, the temperatures were low and there was a pretty amount of snow. I knew the treasure-hunters were rash but I could not believe they were that much as to do so.

I had visited this tumulus and some others in 1991 when I directed the excavations of a tumular necropolis between the villages of Krasново and Krastevich to the west of Starossel. The great tumulus, shaping the top of a large hill, was a part integral of the landscape. Some roughly treated stone blocks had tumbled disorderly in the periphery of the 'hill' and down its slope but they did not deserve to be called 'chipped'. The other tumulus in Manasticheto locality, piled alongside the way going between the village and the large tumulus, looked more interesting. It was twice smaller and was covered with thick and high oak trees. A tunnel was dug from the south and I was told that treasure-hunters had found there a stone wall. Since we were soiled, tired, and had not noticed any single stone there, we decided firmly and once again not to get astray by stories about treasure-hunter's 'discoveries'. On the next year, we fully forgot about our decision and went to Starossel to rescue a tomb recently excavated in Roshava tumulus to the west of the village. This time we were not misled but it turned out it was a tomb studied by the great Bulgarian archaeologist Dr. Ivan Velkov. Our excavations were not useless - we managed to specify precisely the plan of the construction, discovered facts, which had been missed by Dr. Ivan Velkov and found new materials.

At the end of February 2000, the author of the letter began calling me. He reiterated about a wall surrounding the tumulus, staircases, a dromos, a façade (measuring more than





Fig. 1. Chetinyova tumulus seen from south-east



Fig. 2. Chetinyova tumulus with the excavated temple

4 m in width), a pediment formed with blocks decorated with plastic ornaments and even letters on them. No such combination was known by the Thracian archaeology and no one could admit its existence. Simultaneously, it seemed incredible that an ordinary man, I mean a non-archaeologist, could figure out and combine elements of the under-tumular architecture, each of them being plausible by itself. On the other hand, I felt the man was of good faith and showed a sincere and unselfish concern for the issue. On March 4, 2000 I went to Starosel and could hardly believe my eyes. An impressive architectural construction, as big as to go beyond any archaeologist's dreams, was 'seen' under piles of rough and chipped stones (Fig. 1) in a strip (approximately 10 m in width and 30 m in length). At the end of the year the cultural public of Bulgaria and a great deal of the world one had already seen it either 'life' (more than 15.000 peo-

ple) or on the TV or on the newspaper and magazine pages.

Chetinyova tumulus (Fig. 2), where the construction was built, was piled on a large hill, visible within a region of some dozens of kilometers in radius provided the weather is good. Closely there are some picturesque rocky formations, which the Thracians declared sanctuaries (Fig. 3) and strictly worshipped. Later on, some of them got buried up under tumuli. Dozens of other man-made embankments are seen in the region. There the air is as pure as a crystal, the winter is mild, the summer is fresh, the region is rich in mineral springs, the ground is fertile, the water basins are full with fish and the forests are abundant in game (Fig. 4). What else could have wished the ancient Thracians to declare the place a sanctuary, worship their gods there and bury around their worshipped rulers and most respectful representatives of their aristocracy?



Fig. 3. Kamenitsa sanctuary



Fig. 4. View from Chetinyova tumulus to the south



Fig. 5. Gold rosette from Roshava tumulus temple



Fig 6. Clay vessels from Roshava tumulus temple

Prior to our excavations, the village, known under its old name village of Staro Novo Selo, was famous for its Thracian heritage. The temple in **Roshava tumulus**, discovered occasionally in 1926 and studied by Dr. Ivan Velkov, is located in the southern periphery of the tumulus in order to be accessible for the religious ceremony attendants. It has got a rectangular chamber and an antechamber and is surmounted by a seldom seen elsewhere trapezoid-shaped roof. On both sides the roof construction is shaped at a certain angle and at the middle it is crossed by a horizontal stone band, which shapes the upper base of the trapezoid. In two corners of the chamber oval-shaped beds are dug out on the floor to be used, undoubtedly, as funeral urns. This shows that at least two men were buried in the chamber. Their dead bodies were burnt out and the ashes were collected in clay or metal urns. The roof of the antecham-



ber used to be supported by two columns. These were not discovered by us - it turned out that long time ago they had been transported to the village and exhibited in front of the house where many antique objects, relevant to Starosel history and ethnography, have been kept. The ritual platform in front of the antechamber is produced with rammed down soil, ashes and scorching and its front limit fades within the layers 'eaten away' by the time.

The temple in Roshava tumulus is unique for its space structure, beds in the floor and the columns in the antechamber. Its partial parallels were found out considerably later - a column in the antechamber of the tomb in Sushmanets near Shipka (1966) and two semi-columns in the façade of the tomb in Smyadovo.

Dr. Ivan Velkov found a beautiful miniature ram head of gold that used to form the end of a torque. We found yet another gold object - a round-shaped decoration for a cloth (Fig. 5) as well as two clay vessels (Fig. 6) - one with letters carved out on its walls. The tomb-temple was utilized over the 4th c. BC. Five centuries later a Thracian warrior, hired by the Romans, got buried in another tumulus in the region - **Vanina tumulus**. His dead body was ritually burned out and the ashes were laid down in several clay vessels (Fig. 7) alongside with some weapons and two gold earrings (Fig. 8). The find evidences once again that jewel wearing in the antiquity was not a female privilege, neither it is nowadays. A large silver coin, minted under emperor Gettae, indicates the exact date of the burial - the very



Fig 7. Clay pot from Vanina tumulus



Fig. 8. Gold earrings from Vanina tumulus

beginning of the AD 3rd c. A necropolis (deceased people town) dates to the same period and comprises over than 250 small tumuli, located between the villages of **Krasnovo** and **Krastevich**. Treasure-hunters destroyed many of them because of their insignificant sizes. However, in some other tumuli we managed to excavate a lot of graves where the burials were performed through cremation according to the prevailing funeral ritual at that time. The gravegoods consist mainly in pottery but they

include also jewels, weapons, coins and some other objects.

Once the region got appreciated and settled in, it did not lose its importance till today. Over the Late Roman and Byzantine Ages the impressive town-walls (Fig. 9) of Diocletianopolis (the present-day Hissar) intimidated the enemy troops and ensured quiet and gratifying days to its citizens. In the Middle Age dozens of strongholds protected the inhabitants of the First and Second Bulgarian States. There the life went on during the period of the Turkish slavery and after the Liberation took place the region kept on prospering owing to the therapeutic mineral springs in Hissar, Krasnovo, Banya, etc. By mid 20th c. Starossel (previous name Staro Novo Selo) was known as a large and prosperous settlement having its own Forestry Board, Court, Police Department, hospital, etc.

The richness of archaeological monuments within the lands of Starossel forced us in using the term **Thracian cult center**. It is justified, even as per our so far researches, by the existence of six under-tumular temples over the Thracian antiquity, four of them being



unique, It is important to emphasize that they were constructed on a surface of less than 100 sq. km, which is a proximity unexpected and unknown from other Thracian regions. For comparison, I will indicate that twelve temples in the Valley of the Thracian Rulers (Kazanlak region) occupy the territory of approximately 250 sq. km. Furthermore, dozens of tumulus were piled up near Starossel, in which the remnants of rich king's graves were preserved partly or entirely. Also, there are tumulus that have not been excavated yet and they are the potential custodians of monuments of the Thracian antiquity. The picture would have been yet more impressive, if many of the embankments had not been become the victims of a treasure-hunter's vandalism going beyond any control.

It is beyond any doubt that the temple had a leading role among the elements of the Thracian cult center near Starossel.



Fig. 9. The main gate of Diocletianopolis fortress (Hissar) - Kamilite



Fig. 10. Part of the crepis with the west pedestal of the staircase



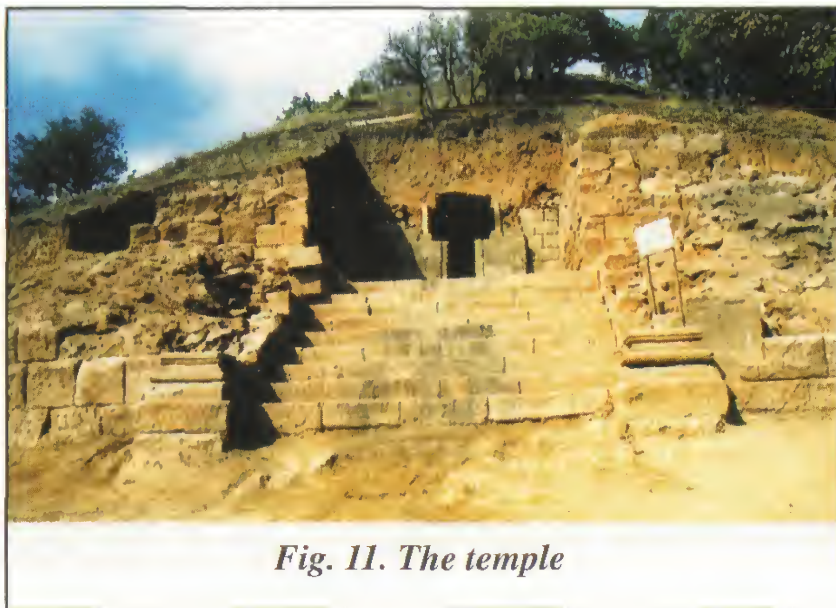


Fig. 11. The temple

Seeking for emphasizing the importance of the temple and making the tumulus well seen from a great distance, the Thracians surrounded **Chetinyova tumulus** by an ashlar granite-blocks wall (Fig. 10). Actually the wall measures 241 m in length and up to 3,5 m in height, while in the antiquity it exceeded 5,5 m, and its construction needed at least 5.000-6.000 chipped blocks. The wall is called 'a crepis' and is shaped as a circle, which is the symbol of the

sun as per the Thracian religious beliefs. From the southeast the wall is broken and this is exactly the point the temple front staircase originates from (Fig. 11). It has got nine steps, built of perfectly chipped stone blocks and slabs. It is flanked by partly preserved wall, which used to be a high one at that time. Two profiled pedestals, which used to support the majestic figures of two full size lions, mark the beginning of the wall. During the excavations we found three lion paws, the animal bodies being stolen by the treasure-hunters. Similar had been the destiny of the stone pediment with plastic decoration. It had been broken into some large pieces. A relief and multicolor decoration used to cover its front side. Some people, who managed to visit the tumulus soon after the treasure-hunter's activity, evidenced that there had been a painted inscription on one of the fragments. We found out an antefix (a corner triangular block from the pediment) with the image of a semi-palmette and a stylized white-painted sun. The theft of the remaining parts of the pediment is an undeniable crime since for the time being a unique inscription is known and its interpretation is questionable. Finding and interpreting the Starossel inscription might be



of crucial importance for the Thracian archaeology.

The front staircase goes to a flat platform with enough big sizes to perform ritual dances on. Both on the left and right sides there are smaller, but similarly thoroughly hewn staircases (Fig. 12), for which purpose there are two presumptions. According to the first one they served for seats for the spectators or attendants of the religion ceremonies. According to the other one, these were the beginnings of alleys, surrounding the tumulus and being used for festive processions. Such a case has already been registered in the closely located Zhaba tumulus near Strelcha. We may not exclude the combination of both functions. The platform is fairly flat. An upward corridor starts from the platform end and goes to the façade of the temple itself. This corridor is a majestic one. It is more than 10 m long and 6 m wide and its walls are imposing with their height exceeding 5 m. The huge stone blocks of the wall construction have relatively rough surfaces and leave the visitors with the impression of inferiority and worthlessness and in the same time suggest the majesty and dominance of the person they

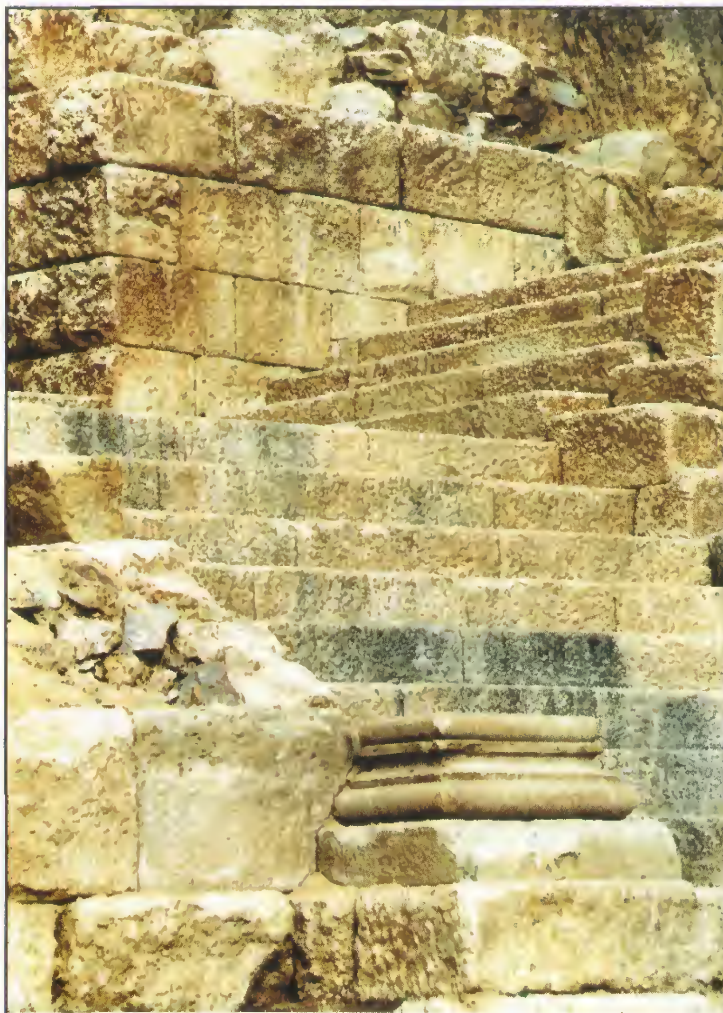


Fig. 12. The western pedestal with parts of the front and eastern staircases



Fig. 13. The façade



Fig. 14. The arches on the threshold for moving the two-wing door to the first chamber

were build up for. The visitors used to be and they still are surprised by the comparison of the roughness of the side-walls to the delicacy and the impressing exquisiteness of the façade (Fig. 13). The façade is build with large but perfectly chipped blocks of volcanic tuff - mild stone, suggesting tenderness with its greenish color. The stone is not known in the surrounding area and presumably it was transported from about thirty kilometers, not far away from Strelcha, where such deposits have been found out. The conscious use of the stone, accompanied by some difficulties, suggests the purposefulness of the ancient Thracian designers' and constructors' actions and evidence requirements relevant to high, strong and long-lasting artistic, ritual and religious norms.

Two slightly projected posts (pilasters) with a profiled base and top flank the façade. The wall is destroyed in the height and - due to the lack of analogues - that is

only the imagination that can suggest what existed above it - most probably, it was again a pediment but much more delicate and impressive. Unfortunately, not a single trace has survived it.

Three steps go to the entrance. Two deeply carved arches (Fig. 14) on the threshold catch the visitors' eyes. There is only one arch on the threshold towards the round premises. Up and down beds and holes for the door axes are preserved - two for the first one and one for the second one. Pieces of them are scattered round about. They are massive and 'speak' too much. The classic interpretation of the under-tumular constructions is an elementary one: they are usually declared tombs - the last 'home' of the buried aristocrat or ruler. Well, if so, we have to figure out what was the purpose of the staircases, the corridor, the impressive façade and the chute in the threshold, which evidence the doors had been open and closed many times. Obviously, the interpretation needs to be adjusted and the constructions have to be specified as tem-

ples- mausoleums where the deified rulers were worshipped and paid honors at special occasions. Similarly, the entrances to both premises are flanked by two lateral and a cover slabs. Incised and painted ornaments (Fig. 15) decorate them. There are three step-like



Fig. 15. Plastic and color decoration on the side plate to the entrance to the first chamber





Fig. 16. Plastic decoration from the entry of the Strelcha tomb-mausoleum

smooth fields, followed by two relief belts - astragal or pearl-string (projecting semi-spheres, alternating with two vertical relief teeth) and ova or Ionian cyma (egg-shaped ornament reminding also vegetal leaves with its semi-elliptical outlines, inscribed in each another, alternating with relief lines). Then there is a belt with an element painted in red and dark blue and called meander due to the lines forming it and crossing at right angles. Before the Starossel temple got found such a decoration was seen only on the entrance of the Strelcha tomb-mausoleum (Fig. 16), constructed only around 20 km to the west. And yet in a scene depicted on the amphora-rhyton from the famous Panagyurishte gold treasure (Fig. 17). There the scene represents the façade of a building, having an entrance with a similar decoration, and five armed men, half-naked and jumping in a strange way. One of them plays an instrument, which is some kind of trumpet. The most respectful interpretation of the scene says that it represents

the attack and the conquest of the fortress walls of the well known Greek town-and-state Thebes, immortalized in 'The Seven Men from Thebes' legend. Well, what are these half-naked warriors attacking a fortress? They seem rather dancing than jumping. On the other side, the picture shows an old man and a young man standing and discussing. The interpre-



Fig. 17. The door from the gold amphora-rhyton from the Panagyurishte treasure

tation launched after the excavation of the Strelcha tomb-mausoleum can be considered confirmed to a high extent. In the ancient art the scenes pictured to the right and left sides of the doors are considered to represent respectively the inside and outside spaces of the buildings. Hence, the scene represents a Thracian temple where a Thracian ruler is about to be buried. In the temple two priests (an old and a young one) prepare the ceremony and try to predict the future from an animal liver, which the old man holds in his left hand. The wooden door is divided into four fields and the projecting horizontal bands (cross-pieces) let see the heads of the nails fastening the planks, marked like buds. Identical are the stone-made doors from Starossel (Fig. 18). There are pieces of such doors in Strelcha and in Kazanlak - in the Valley of the Thracian Rulers - some of the temples have got exactly such stone-made door-wings (preserved partly or fragmented). Yet many arguments can be given to support the state-

ment that the Panagyurishte treasure was elaborated by Thracian craftsmen and was intended to be used by a rich Thracian ruler or aristocrat with strong artistic taste.

The first chamber of the temple is rectangular. It is much larger than the so far known ones. Its roof is original. Up to a certain height the walls are vertical and then they begin vaulting. The vault is formed with blocks and is performed in a manner not known so far. The lower half of the walls is vertical, while the upper half is arch-cut to outline a semi-cylinder. Above the arches are cut by crossbeams, which are mounted at two levels and combine a flat and a step-shaped roof.



Fig. 18. Partly restored stone door to the round chamber with imitated studs

The second chamber is round-shaped. With its diameter of 5,40 m it turns to be the largest one in Bulgaria. There is only one larger chamber near Lozengrad in European Turkey. Our chamber has got ten decorative semi-columns on its periphery, performed to look elegantly and having nine vertical flutes. At the top they end by original Doric capitals painted in red and blue. Over them there is a frieze with triglyphes and metopes (Fig. 19), well known from the Greek architecture. The triglyphes imitate the transom of the roof, while the metopes are the almost square and smooth fields between them. In our chamber the triglyphes are marked by three vertical lines and in their lower part they have plastic vertical buds and painted decoration in light and dark blue and red. The dome of the roof begins as of the upper line of the frieze. The dome is like the one in the first chamber - with alternating vertical and arch-shaped fields (partly used only in a tomb near Lozengrad in European Turkey). We still do not know how many rows are preserved and whether the

height presumed by us (around 5,5 - 6 m) is precise. The inside of the round chamber was filled with earth and blocks originating from the roof construction. The stones used to be



fastened with iron cramps, covered with cast lead to hold stronger. It is hard to believe that such a construction could collapse under the strongest pressure or the most devastating earthquake. After all, how did the roof collapse? Was not it been dismantled deliberately? Yes, it was!

Some masonry joints were forced by means of pickaxes and then the iron cramps were broken and the blocks were left to fall on the floor, the keystone being the first to precipitate down. Then the façade was buried and the corridor was filled with earth and stones

and separated with a specially designed wall, which we found before to outline it, and which purpose remained questionable for a long time. Similarly the staircase got buried. Its beginning was separated with such a wall, which helped the wall (crepis) to look intact at this place (Fig 20). The tumular embankment was piled up and restored in order not to be evident that in the past there was a staircase, a corridor and a temple to the southeast!

What was the reason for this useless work? Who needed to cover up their tracks? It is not possible to answer these questions categorically, although such actions have already been registered in some temples in the Valley of the Thracian Rulers near Kazanlak, near Strelcha and elsewhere. Presumably, there is a detail, which can suggest us the possible explanation. Like it was in the antiquity and like it is almost nowadays, temples were considered to be the well-deserved place to hold the mortal remains of the most eminent



Fig. 19. Detail of the decoration in the round chamber

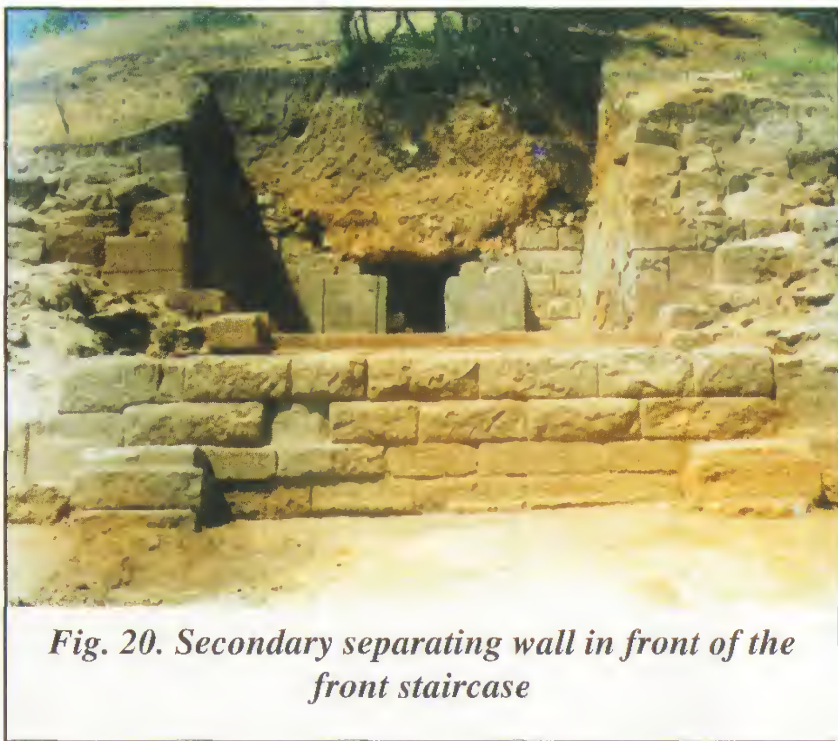


Fig. 20. Secondary separating wall in front of the front staircase

state men. Everybody knows where Czar Boris III was buried and what the destiny of his grave was. It is beyond any doubt that the Starossel temple is the burial place of a Thracian ruler or rulers. The archaic outlines of the semi-columns in the central chamber suggest that the temple was most probably built in the late 5th c. BC. Some vessels and cult objects found in the ritual pits nearby are earlier, while some coins (among them 2 coins minted by Philip II of Macedon) evidence that the surface around the wall (crepis) used to be utilized

and worshipped also in mid 4th c. BC. Therefore, most probably the place was worshipped as a sanctuary yet in 6th c. BC, the temple was built up in the last decades of 5th c. BC and was used over the entire 4th c. BC.

Taking into consideration that the Chetinyova tumulus temple is the most majestic so far known in Thrace, it is hard to believe that in 150 years of history of the Thracian archaeology a lot of temples of the same rank and period would be found, asking who was that powerful ruler who ordered the construction of the impressive building is a very good question. It is well known that a remarkable ruler - Sitalkes, perpetuated by the Greek historian Xenophon in his work 'Anabasis' - lived in mid 5th. c. BC and got murdered in the last quarter of the century. In our opinion, it seems he was the only one to be able to order, control and finance such an expensive and imposing construction. Consequently, it is hard not to presume with a

high degree of probability that a funeral service was read over Sitalkes in 'his' temple and he was declared god and buried in the temple or nearby. Most probably other rulers and/or noblemen wished to have the temple as their last and eternal home and thus the temple began to serve as a mausoleum.

There are curious historical circumstances relevant to Sitalkes. This ruler, well known from the historic sources, is one of the few famous rulers, who did not left coins minted in his name. Recently Mr. Stavri Topalov made an attempt (successful in my opinion) to compare Sitalkes to Saratokes, the Odrysian ruler from the late 5th c. BC. Silver coins, minted under his rule, have been found almost everywhere in Thrace, even on some Greek islands. It is much surprising that this active coin producer was so unnoticeable for the ancient authors that they did not even mentioned his name. Mr. Topalov gives a lot of arguments to prove that Sitalkes and Saratokes were one and the same person - the first name being mentioned in the historic sources and the second one - on coins.

Now let us come back to the present day and try to explain why such an impressive architectural construction got destroyed, hidden and abandoned. What did happen to George Dimitrov's mausoleum? They said they would destroy it in a minute but it stood a week! It does not exist any more, its place is occupied by lovely small gardens and in some time the historians will be the only ones to know that there was a tomb-mausoleum in the very center of Sofia and there people used to pay homage to the mortal remains of a communist ruler. Most probably, similar incentives (disavowing of a ruler, ideology or religion) decided the destiny of the temple under Chetinyova tumulus.

The tumulus was the center of an authoritative cult complex. Religious ceremonies took place in the temple; most probably they were relevant to the cult to the Great Mother Goddess, her son - the Sun, and Orpheus. Most likely disciples of Orpheus met here the sun raise thus emphasizing their partiality for Helios - the god of the sun. According to one of the legends, the mythical singer provoked Dionysos to express his indignation against the demonstrative paying homage to Helios. The god of the wine and gayety instructed his female adherents, called Bassarides, to dismember the singer's body and bury the pieces in



Fig. 21. H.M. Margarete II, Queen of Denmark, seeing the winery



Fig. 22. Entry to Manyova tumulus temple in 2000

different places. As per another story, the action was accomplished by some women displeased with Orpheus, who prompted their men to attend and take part in unknown ceremonies, and thus prevented them from male company. The gods punished the women's boldness. They felt desperate and began searching for the singer's body pieces. They managed to find only his head, which was floating in a river and was keeping on singing by some miracle. They buried the head, piled a large tumulus over it, declared the tumulus a heroon (a sacred place to pay homage to a hero) and performed religious ceremonies from time to time.

Chetinyova tumulus was used as such a heroon. A rocky formation, located immediately to its northeastern periphery, was declared sacred. Steps are hewn in the rock and go to the sacred place. Rituals pits, located terrace-like, are dug in the rock

close to the steps. Sacrifices were performed in them. The sacrificial animal was killed in the highest pit, the blood was left to leak down the slope and the priests scrutinized it and predicted the ruler's and his dependents' future.

An oval construction was built some thirty meters to the west of the sanctuary. The inside walls are coated with waterproof plaster of good quality. This was the antique method to shape the water reservoirs. But they are always much larger, while our 'tub' can hold only 5 or 6 t of liquid. So, what kind of tub was it? Inside we found fragments of vessels for drinking (cups and jugs) as well as of a strainer. The Thracian wine was heavy and contained pips and grains and therefore it needed to be strained. Obviously, we found a winery (Fig. 21). Whom was it meant for? The religious ceremonies and the Orphic mysteries performed in the temple were accompanied by wine drinking, while every mortuary ritual involved a three-day ceremony, which was also relevant to drinking and 'over-drinking' this enchanting liquid. By the way, the local wine was and still is good. In the region thousands of acres were and actually are covered with vineyards. What else is needed to associate the region with the sanctuary of Dionysos, which many people have been looking for for more than one and half centuries?

Besides for sanctuaries and sacred places the region was used to pile up dozens of tumuli. Tombs-mausoleums were constructed in Roshava and Manyova tumuli but, unfortunately, they got plundered yet in the antiquity.

We have already spoken about the Roshava tumulus temple.

The temple in Manyova tumulus came to light in 1999. It was studied by Dr. Kostadin Kissyov and Dr. Mitko Madzharov. Unfortunately, lately the temple was neglected and actually it is in a poor condition (Fig. 22). In principle, it is a smaller copy of the very temple in Chetinyova tumulus that is only half a kilometer away in a straight line. Three steps go to the entry of the first (rectangular) chamber. The entry is outlined by slabs with step-like profiled bands but it does not have the plastic and color decoration of the Chetinyova tumulus temple. The rectangular chamber is covered by almost an entirely destroyed semi-cylindrical vault like the one in the big temple. The domed roof of the round chamber is



Fig. 23. Kulishka tumulus



Fig. 24. The temple. The threshold with holes for a two-wing door (in the foreground)

fully missing. However, they may be reconstructed like the remaining parts of the temple by means of the stone blocks scattered around. Stone doors, actually preserved at pieces, closed the entries to both chambers (like it was everywhere in the region).

Even the temple from Manyova tumulus resembles the one in Chetinyova tumulus, it is a unique piece of the Thracian architecture, which can and certainly will be reconstructed in order to fill in the collection of Thracian architectural masterpieces in Starossel cult center.

In 2002 the collection got filled in with another three monuments. **Kuilishka tumulus** (Fig. 23), is extraordinary good-looking, although treasure-hunter's have disfigured it a little by an ugly excavation from the southeast. It is at about one kilometer to the southeast of Roshava tumulus. There they found a stone construction and almost destroyed it. We cleaned

up the construction and found out that it was a small temple. It consists of a single rectangular room, having its entry to the southeast. It used to be closed by a two-wing stone door, from which only some pieces have been preserved. The beds for the axes of the door wings are clearly seen on the floor close to the entry (Fig. 24). Stone slabs covered the floor but we do not have any data for the type of the roof since the walls are preserved up to 3 or 4 rows maximum. However, the analysis of the shapes of the stone blocks, scattered by the treasure-hunters and arranged by us, will submit enough information to enable the temple reconstruction in order to turn it into a tourist site.

Unlike, the temple in **Nedkova tumulus** is well preserved. It is the only one in this part of Bulgaria (the other two are in Vetren, Pazardzhik region, and Filipovo, quarter of Plovdiv), which chamber was not fully



Fig. 25. Nedkova (left) and Peeva tumuli in Oreshaka locality



Fig. 26. The antechamber of the temple in Nedkova tumulus



Fig. 27. The chamber of the temple

filled in with soil.

Nedkova tumulus (Fig. 25) was piled up in the plain at about 7-8 km to the southeast of Chetinyova tumulus in Oreshaka locality - within the lands of the former village of Eleshnitsa. Only about 10 % of the embankment were studied and there we found 21 ritual pits. They had been dug out between the 5th and 2nd c. BC (before and after the tumulus got piled). What makes the tumulus important and unique is the building in the southeastern periphery, which was constructed after a part

of the tumular embankment was taken away. The temple has got a rectangular antechamber (Fig. 26) and a small rectangular chamber. Both premises are covered with thick stone slabs and are built with large and perfectly treated white limestone blocks. A technique typical for the Thracians was used to reinforce the construction - iron cramps, shaped as a swallowtail and covered with cast lead to hold stronger. On both sides the antechamber is outlined by short walls, ending by pilasters with rectangular profiled capitals. The seldom-met ornament called 'wolf's teeth' forms the upper belt. It continues on the side walls of the antechamber, over the entry and alongside the entire chamber (Fig. 27). The origin of the ornament is same as the one of the metopes and triglyphs in Chetinyova tumulus temple. Here the wooden beams in the base of the roof construction and the fields among them are replaced by projected parallelogram small blocks and the flat surface among them. The roof evidences a combination of construction and psychological factors.



It is produced with enormous black granite crossbeams, while the spaces among them are free and closed at a higher level than the white limestone blocks typical for the remaining part of the construction. This kind of roof construction is not known from other Thracian under-tumular temples. The opposition between the black and white colors will give the specialists of Thracian religion the opportunity to extend the 'black and white' repertoire by another example.



Fig. 28. The five ritual pits in front of the temple

The imitation of trimmer joints by means of 'wolf's teeth' is known in another version from Ostrusha tumulus within the Valley of the Thracian Rulers in Kazanlak region. This fact, alongside other observations, gives enough grounds to date the temple construction to the early 4th c. BC. This temple, like the other ones, was used at least by the beginning of the following century. Over this period a platform was shaped from rammed down construction wastes (and most probably by scorching) in front of the entry. Additionally five ritual pits, arranged like the Olympic circles, were produced in the platform (Fig. 28). Rituals, relevant to sacrifices and other religious ceremonies, took place around them. Later the temple got abandoned and remained buried under the tumulus for reasons unknown for the time being. An attempt was made to destroy the temple but this time the malefactors were either short of force or they got satisfied with the partial destruction of the right wall of the chamber. The attempts to pull out the iron cramps remained vain and now one can see just some holes among the blocks in the chamber.



Fig. 29. Horizont tumulus

The research of Nedkova tumulus will continue till the character and the size of the pit sanctuary will be clarified out and the temple will turn into a part of the tourist and archaeological complex near Starossel.

The treasure-hunters became again the reason of discovering an imposing and unique Thracian temple in **Horizont tumulus** (this is the Bulgarian spelling). We gave this name to the unnamed tumulus (Fig. 29) in acknowledgment of the European Foundation Hori-

zon, which has been supporting considerably our excavations financially and morally for some years. As a matter of fact, this is the tumulus in Manastircheto locality where we saw a treasure-hunter's tunnel in 1991. In the meantime the treasure-hunters did not stop working. Their sporadic outrages resulted in several excavations on the embankment. Most of them were 'vain'. In the winter and the spring of 2002 they were on their mettle and by means of some vertical pits and horizontal tunnels they managed to 'catch' the stone temple. Fortunately, their activity got stopped in just time and an extraordinary monument of the Thracian architecture of the late 5th and 4th c. BC was saved for the science.

The rich experience in construction works learned the Thracians to take measures to prevent the access of humidity in the premises of the under-tumular constructions. The outside walls of the buildings were coated with a thick stone jacket of river pebbles and rough stones. It served as a drain and prevented the water infiltration. In the same time the jacket reinforced the walls and made them more resistant to earthquakes, erosion and



other natural factors. In Horizont tumulus the treasure-hunters reached the stone jacket at several occasions, adjusted the direction of the next tunnels and their last tunnel reached the southern corner of the temple.

We cleaned out the temple (Fig. 30) entirely. This is the only temple in Thrace with a colonnade. While the number of the columns in Roshava tumulus temple is two, in Shushmanets tumulus temple (near Shipka) it is one, here there are ten columns. Six of them are located in front of the construc-



Fig. 30. The temple

tion and a total of four items flank it on both sides and form a rectangular block, which used to be projected onwards the tumulus and well seen and impressed the worshippers' imagination by its imposing appearance. Every column is laid down on a base and has got two drums and a Doric order capital (Fig. 31). The space between the face and the lateral columns resembles a transverse corridor but, actually, it was something like a large antechamber where the people entered through an entry between the central columns and three steps. It enabled the access to the central chamber through a smaller antechamber.

The observations on the relations between and among the different architectural elements allow distinguishing some construction periods in the use of the tumulus and the temple. First the embankment was piled up, in which the central chamber was built additionally. Short after that it was buried and, obviously, the small antechamber remained visible. Later on, the colonnade was erected and a reconstruction was made to reinforce



Fig. 31. The entry between the central columns

the temple by means of additional walls. These are performed thoroughly but with rough and, we may say, unsightly stones. The reason for this was that the walls had only a construction function and then they were buried in order not to be seen. Finally, at a certain stage a noble representative of the Thracian aristocracy, most probably a king, was buried in the temple. Later on, for unknown reasons for the time being, his grave was violated and the grave goods were plundered. However, some objects remained scattered on the floor and they speak eloquently about the buried person's social status. Twelve arrowheads specify him as a warrior. Many silver beads evidence that his cloths were trimmed with silver. Fifteen lamellae of pure gold (fig. 32) are extremely valuable. They are square (one of the corners being rounded) and have got holes in order to be sewed to cloths. It is beyond any doubt that the lamellae were parts of an armor, presumably leather one, and thousands of them were sewed on it. The dilemma if the man was

an aristocrat or a king was set categorically - a Thracian ruler from the 4th c. BC was buried in the temple.



We measured thoroughly the column drums scattered around. After the calculations made under the direction of the restorer Dr. Georgi Mavrov, we put the columns and capitals back to their places. Then, upon our project Minstroy Company constructed a solid and beautiful protective building, which will house the temple till its entire restoration. However, even in its actual condition, the temple is an imposing and attractive tourist and archaeological site.

The rich burial, performed in mid 4th c. BC in **Peychova tumulus** and accompanied by a little known ritual, can again be associated to a noble person.

A strange stone formation is located one hundred or so steps away from Chetinyova tumulus temple. Some rocks erect to the sky and resemble phalluses - the ancient symbol of health and fertility. It is beyond any doubt that the natural phenomenon was perceived, deified and worshipped by the Thracians as a gift of gods. Certainly a ruler died at mid 4th c. BC and the surface around the rock was chosen to be his burial place. He used to be a follower and worshipper of Orpheus. Like Orpheus, his dead body was torn to three pieces and buried nearby. After the respective rituals a large stone heap was piled over and it hid partly the rocky sanctuary. A pit was dug and coated with stone blocks in the periphery. The ruler's grave goods were laid down in this way produced stone-built symbolic grave. The list of the burial gifts is quite a long one. There are plenty of sets of objects, well



Fig. 32. Gold lamellae from an armor



Fig. 33. Silver forehead-piece shaped as a double-axe



Fig. 34. Horse-trappings on a horse head from the wall paintings in Alexandrovo tomb

known from other sites and usually laid down singly. Sets of items, known from elsewhere and laid down in a single piece, are offered here together. Usually, finding out appliquéés for horse-trappings, imported clay vessels, Thracian metal vessels and gold jewelry is accepted as a sensation. In Peychova tumulus the quantity of these is breath taking. There are three silver appliquéés for horse-trappings, three imported Greek vessels with pictured walls, a full set of weapons, gold jewelry, etc.

The simplest set of appliquéés for horse-trappings consists of nine round appliquéés with no decoration. It comprises also an elongated one, shaped as a double-axe (labrys) (Fig. 33), which was the symbol of authority and power in every ancient society. By that time two similar sets were known from Panagyurishte and Rozovets, located at about 30 km to the west and east respectively. Weighty scholars 'riveted' in the archaeology the con-



clusion that they used to cover the surface of leather shields. Furthermore, the thesis seemed unshakable since the sizes of the silver double-axes are too large. Two similar decorations on the heads of horses depicted in the Kazanlak tomb looked smaller in terms of proportion and there was no room for discussion. However, in Peychova tumulus there was a bronze shield, leather-coated on both sides, and it was clear that the appliqués could not belong to it. Less than four months had to pass (between August 17, when the grave

in Peychova tumulus was found out, and December 17, when we entered Alexandrovo tomb) before resolving a problem of the Thracian archaeology that had lasted for decades. In the Alexandrovo wall paintings there are seven horsemen among the other remarkable images. Their horses have got splendid silver, gold and bronze (as per the colors they are depicted in) horse-trappings. There are two decorations on every horse head (one on the nose and another on the forehead), shaped as double-axes (Fig. 34), strongly arched and with their end parts strongly projected onward. This is exactly the shape of our labrys. Now, there is no room for discussions - our labrys, as well as those from Panagyurishte and Rozovets, used to decorate the heads of saddle horses and not shields.

The second horse-trappings set (silver again) comprises a nose-piece, six check-pieces and six appliqués without decoration. The nose-piece is a unique one. This is the first time in the Thracian art that an item offers the image of a monster, combining a bull head and



*Fig. 35. Silver forehead-piece - a bull head
with ram horns*



Fig. 36. Forehead-piece with the picture of a Thracian ruler/horseman

ram horns in a strange way (Fig. 35). The check-pieces are covered with stylized pictures of monsters and resemble those found in Vratsa in 1966.

The third horse-trappings set impresses with its unique forehead-piece - a round appliqué with an engraved horseman (Fig. 36). He is riding to the left and wears a knee-piece (knee-guard) with the image of a human face on his left leg. Such knee-pieces are known from two findings - in Vratsa and Adzhigiol in Rumania. On the other hand, so far the Letnitsa treasure was the only one comprising the image of a horseman with such a knee-piece. The Starossel horse-

man is more precious and important than the Letnitsa one for two reasons. The horseman holds a rhyton in his right hand and is about to drink wine (no doubt about). The rhyton was one of the king's power symbols in Thrace and its picture suggests that the person depicted on the appliqué was a king, most probably the buried man. This presumption is confirmed categorically by a detail - a sign is incised on the horse hip and it has got the shape of a double-axe (labrys). In general, the check-pieces from the set are known from other findings but this time they are produced in an original and unknown style. Four of them represent three griffin necks and heads, stormy swirled clockwise and counter-clockwise (Fig. 37). The last two appliqués offer a subject, which is quite popular in the Thra-





Fig. 37. Silver appliqué from horse-trappings - triskele



Fig. 38. Silver check-piece with clutched lion's paws

cian art - clutched lion's paws. Though, the joint (the hip) is presented as a predatory and open eagle's mouth (Fig. 38).

The set of weapons is a full one. The bronze helmet (Fig. 39) is known by its shape as 'Attic' type. There are nose-guards and check-guards. A silver decoration used to be appliquéd on the forehead, while its entire surface was gold-plated. The king had a leather armor, ending by an impressive collar (neck-guard). It fastens with buttons on the neck and has got a vertical and an oblique part, formed by hundreds of projecting silver lamellas, covered with a thick gild. This is the first finding of such a collar in Bulgaria. The shield of the ruler-warrior is round, bronze-made and leather-coated on both sides. After the conser-





Fig. 39. Bronze-gilded helmet

vation and restoration of the perishable material, it will be presumably found out whether there were images on the leather like those on the Thracian shields represented in some artistic works. The set comprises also two bronze greaves (guards for the parts of the legs between the knees and the ankles).

Another unique finding in Peychova tumulus is a quiver with around 50 bronze arrowheads. They are exclusively well preserved and have got different shapes (Fig. 40). One of the arrowheads is worth describing individually - it has got two couples of prickly-like extensions, which make it resemble a harpoon. We can only imagine what a terrible pain was provoked by the feeblest attempt to pull out of the wounded human body such an arrowhead with large and sharp reverse prickles. It sounds unbelievable, but it is a real fact that parts of the bow are preserved as well as the greater part of the wooden-made

arrow-bodies, which were deliberately broken in two pieces. Incised flutes for inserting them in the bowstring are seen on some of the arrows. The weapons comprise some iron spearheads and a short iron sword, which by its shape is known as 'akinakes'. The widely spread opinion that the akinakes is a sword, typical for the Persians and Scythians, is wrong. It was well known and utilized by the Thracians too.





Fig. 40. Quiver with arrows



Fig. 41. Horseman and young man depicted on the sides of a pelike

Most probably, the Greek vessels were produced in Athens. Their walls are decorated with red-figure scenes against a black background. Generally speaking, the scenes are selected in order to meet the Thracian aristocracy tastes. The scene on the pelike (vessel with large mouth and two symmetric handles) represents a horseman and a young man (Fig. 41) on one side, and two men discussing (Fig. 42) on the other side. The same scene is on both sides of an exquisite skyphos - a high cup with two horizontal hands. The most interesting and the most intriguing by its shape and subject is a high cup with a cover. A Vetruvian spiral runs on its neck, while the cover is encircled (Fig. 43) by a series of real animals and monsters - lions, sphinxes, etc., some of them being hard to identify.

For some other clay vessels a discussion is possible whether they are works of the Greek or Thracian artistic pottery. The vessels are covered with a black glaze (a fine





Fig. 42. Skyphos with two young men discussing



Fig. 43. Cover of a cup with pictured animas

varnish, which production remains still delicate). The forms were also typical for the Thracian everyday life and most probably were produced in a well-equipped workshop in Thrace. Other rougher vessels are Thracian undoubtedly. The four silver vessels are Thracian undoubtedly too - three of them are genuine masterpieces of the artistic metalwork. The phiale is a low and wide cup for wine or for religious libations. The inner side of its bottom (Fig. 44) is decorated with a projected ornament, resembling a navel, surrounded by a wide ivy wreath, which is engraved and covered with a thick layer of gild. The ivy wreath was an attribute of Dionysos and was the symbol of sorrow in the antiquity and its engraving on the phiale is relevant to the noble Thracian's burial. Furthermore, an ivy wreath (with a thick gild again) is depicted on another big and seldom met vessel. It has got the shape of a semi-sphere, the shoulders are horizontal, the neck is slightly hinted and the mouth rim is drawn outward and covered with a relief pearl string. The silver jug (Fig. 45) has got an elegant shape, one handle and an entirely smooth body. The last silver vessel is a small phiale without decoration. Two situlae (buckets) with two handles and decoration on the



mouth rim and at the place the handles are attached to the body, were laid in the grave too.

A gold signet ring with incised image of a Thracian horseman (Fig. 46) is among the most precious findings in Peychova tumulus. The picture is extremely realistic and expressive. The horseman is portrayed riding hurriedly to the left, his face is visibly strained, his right hand holds the reins, while his left hand is blowing to stick the wild boar, which is fallen close to the horse's legs. A dog is running under the horse and is biting the buttocks of the wild boar. The chase of wild boar is a popular subject in the Thracian mythology and is relevant to the Thracian aristocracy's passion to it. What is more, the chase of the wild boar is considered to be the favorite occupation of the main god in Thrace - the horseman Heros - and is a stage (initiation) of the young aristocrat's growing into a man. The subject was known from a silver-gilded belt found out in Stara Zagora region. At the end of the year it was once again confirmed that there are no occasional events neither in the life, nor in the



*Fig. 44. Silver phiale with gilded
ivy wreath*



Fig, 45. Silver jug



Fig. 46. Gold signet ring with a Thracian horseman



Fig. 47. Chase of a wild boar from the Alexandrovo tomb wall paintings

science, and the destiny blessed us to enter the Alexandrovo tomb, where we were surprised to see two scenes of chase of wild boars (Fig. 47) with horsemen and gun dogs. The gold signet ring from Starossel was undoubtedly specified as a masterpiece of the Thracian toreutics (artistic metalwork). Though, it was not bound to stay unique for a long time.

A month later we excavated **Mavrova tumulus** at approximately one kilometer from the temple. The two pits in it, probably relevant to one and the same burial, turned out to be plundered yet in the antiquity. We can judge how rich they used to be by the fact that the evildoers did not take a gold ring and several other precious objects. The ring (Fig. 48) was utilized as a seal. It is massive and the monster sphinx - winged-lion with a human head - is depicted on its elliptical plate. The body is moderately strained, the front right leg is raised and the paw, modeled as eagle's talons, has hit a dragon with a strange S-shaped body, obviously turned down and in agony if we judge after its wrong-side up body.

The subject is not typical for the Thra-





Fig. 48. Gold signet ring with a sphinx and dragon

cian art and re-creates eastern motifs. What is more, the ring seems to be produced in Persia (ancient Iran) in the 5th c. BC, imported in Thrace as an trade article or a gift, offered by Persian envoys or warriors to a Thracian ruler or aristocrat. A second eastern object, probably of the same origin, is a small glass mask with the image of a bearded man (Fig. 49). Even his face has eastern features - the brows are thick and long, the eyes are 'glassy' with round and odd pupils, surrounded by big black circles. Presumably, the mask was the end-piece of a scepter, which point was put in a specially designed oval hole. An ordinary member of the Thracian society could not have owned both imported objects. The

owner should have been a local ruler or at least a representative of the Thracian aristocracy, taking into consideration the quantity of the preserved precious objects and presuming how many others were taken by the malefactors. In addition, the following were found out in the grave - broken pottery (including imported items), bronze objects, a big glass bead (Fig. 50) and some miniature clay amulets, evidencing that the buried person used to have both earthy and spiritual/religious power as it was typical for the Thracian state system under the kings-priests.

An analogue finding was registered in the closely located **Panchova tumulus**. There it





Fig. 49. Glass mask

seems that a burial was performed in two neighboring pits. The pits had been partly plundered through a deep excavation going from the surface to the foundations of the tumulus. Some signs suggest that it happened soon after the burial since the tunnel from the surface goes straight to the burial pits. Obviously, people, who participated in the funeral ceremony and knew the exact locations of the nobles' dead bodies, produced the tunnel. There is another strange detail in Panchova tumulus. The treasure-hunter's tunnel is filled with earth, containing a significant quantity of miniature gold and silver decorations. This fact can be attributed different explanations but most probably the earth dug from the tunnel was piled in a heap and the small objects fell into. Then, when the tunnel got filled with earth the objects fell one after another and turned to be at different levels of the earth filling. Different materials were found scattered and disarranged in the burial pits. A set of silver appliquéés for horse trappings shows up among the findings. The

forehead-piece (Fig. 51) is a unique one - a neck with an eagle's head with enormous and goggle eyes, big rounded ears and a predatory open beak, goes out of an open-work lamella. The side appliquéés (check-pieces) are from well known types - triskeles (Fig. 52) (three necks with griffin heads go out from a big round goggle eye, which can be interpreted as a stylized sun). The elongated lateral appliquéés represent the well-known subject - 'clutched lion's paws', although performed in a particular way. What is strange is that the two check-pieces do not present the mirror symmetry typical for the Thracian art and are not strongly identical to each other. Both items are left-turned and, although it is obvious they are





Fig. 50. Glass bead



*Fig. 51. Silver forehead-piece
with eagle's head*

produced by one and the same workshop and maybe by one and the same craftsman, they differ considerably in terms of iconography and details.

A curb bit with a specific shape was part of the harness. It is unexpectedly well preserved. The bit is from intertwined iron hooks and prickles, intended to injure the mouth of the animal if it would not execute the commands conveyed by means of the leads. The decorations, which serve to connect different parts of the harness, have got a particularly impressive and symbolic shape. They represent the outlines of a half of the double-axes, typical for earlier times, with strongly projected 'cutting' line and sharpened ends. Their make and symbolism are additional evidence that a noble representative of the Thracian society was buried in this grave.

The purpose of the small gold and silver decorations is questionable. Most of them have



Fig. 52. Silver check-piece - triskele



Fig. 53. Gold appliqués with heraldic eagles

small holes, which leaves place to interpret them as cloth decorations. They are known from the Scythian tumuli in Ukraine and South Russia but they are almost unknown within the Thracian lands. Some of them were found among the components of harnesses or at least they have been specified as parts of the harnesses. For the time being it is not possible to state categorically which group of objects they belong to. However, it is beyond any doubt that their subjects are Thracian and known from findings such as the Letnitsa treasure, the necropolis near the closely located village of Duvanlii, etc. Some of them have got heraldic eagles (Fig. 53) and sphinxes on their face parts, while other represent pictures of lion's heads in profile or seen from above, together with intertwined and hard to interpret vegetal and geometric ornaments. They all are particularly impressive and evidence both

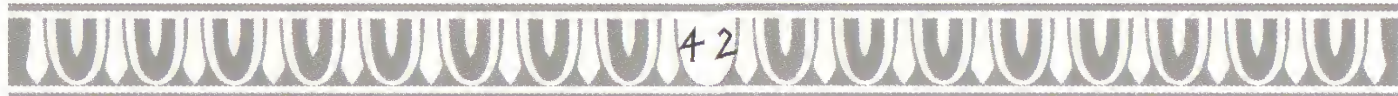




Fig. 54. Stone-built grave in Dzhangozovata tumulus with decoration on the inner walls

the craftsmen's accurate performance and the users' exquisite taste. The set is completed with semi-spherical buttons, small pipes, beads and other objects.

In most of the remaining studied tumuli the damages caused by the treasure-hunter's vandalism are tremendous. Complicated combinations of vertical pits and horizontal tunnels, performed 'professionally' or not, pervade the embankments like cancer metastases inside a human body. Usually, the burial constructions are discovered, turned inside out and so much deprived of their individualities that finally it is difficult to determine whether the plundering was performed in the antiquity or recently. Precisely built graves with large stone slabs were discovered in two tumuli. In one of them (**Dzhangozovata tumulus**) there was a decoration on the inside walls (Fig. 54). On the floor of one of these graves we could even trace the footprints of the treasure-hunters that had found the constructions before us.

Graves, plundered yet in the antiquity, were discovered in two tumuli. The found materials can just suggest how rich the graves used to be. The burials were performed through cremation - one of the two most spread rituals. In **Pavlova tumulus** the burial was performed on a platform, shaped as an irregular rectangle, at the level of the old terrain. Four big holes indicated that the funeral pile was reinforced by means of high posts. Obviously, the plunderers were attracted by the bigger objects as in the layer of ashes and coals we found pieces of an iron sword, bronze, silver and gold



Îñæë 55. Appliqué with swastika on a scabbard

melts. What evidences the social status of the buried person are around fifty bronze buttons. They are shaped as a sphere segment and are coated with a thick gold sheet covering the entire bodies of the items and thus making them resemble gold buttons.

In **tumulus No 32**, not far away from the temple in Nedkova tumulus, the dead body was cremated into a deep rectangular pit. Only some objects, insignificant at first sight, remained after the invasion of the antique treasure-hunters: some entire or broken clay vessels and pieces of bronze and iron objects. An iron sword is entirely and very well preserved but its scabbard, produced of a thinner metal, is destroyed and only an appliqué (handle decoration) is in good condition. On the appliqué there is a relief swastika with specific outlines. Four legs, ending by griffin heads (Fig. 55), go out of a marked center, which is associated with the sun. The appliqué shows an unknown execution of a subject and a composition that are well known in the Thracian art, which makes it a unique

piece. Two large clay objects, produced by sticking some separate fragments, can be characterized similarly. They are shaped as two cones joined at their tops with no baffle between them. We quickly found out that these were Thracian music instruments - timpani (Fig. 56). Nowadays they are known from the Bulgarian ethnography as well as in some

countries in Africa and Asia. They are called 'tambourines' and finding them during archaeological excavations is so seldom that it is considered as a sensation. Furthermore, the walls of the timpani from tumulus No. 32 are covered with complicated incised decoration. The shape of the sword and the style of the picture date the burial as well as the manufacturing and use of the timpani to the late 5th c. BC.

The outlines of the **Thracian cult center** near Starossel are drawn in general. Many sanctuaries, presumed settlements and maybe town centers have to be excavated and they are expected to submit new evidences for the grandeur of the complex and its importance for the Thracian society. Although, it is still enough attractive and interesting as it is. This is proven by the fact that during the excavations in 2000 the site was visited by more than 15.000 friends of the ancient cultures. In 2002 their number exceeded 25.000. Chetinyova tumulus turned into a favorite place to organize local, regional and national celebrations (Fig. 64) and the local people do not miss to make their guests visit it. The temple in the tumulus was sanctified by Orthodox and Catholic priests.



Fig. 56. Clay timpano from tumulus No. 32



Fig. 57. President Parvanov admires the majesty of the temple



Fig. 58. Prime Minister Simeon Saxkobergotski amazed after the first look at the temple

Among the official guests of 2000, it is worth mentioning H.M. Margarete II - Queen of Denmark, and her husband Prince Henrich (Fig. 21), Petar Stoyanov - President of Bulgaria, Todor Kavaldziev - Vice-president of Bulgaria, ambassadors and representatives of almost all diplomatic missions in Sofia, ministers, members of parliament, colleagues from the country and abroad, including a great part of the delegates of the World Congress of Thracology, organized groups of museum experts from Sofia, Varna, Veliko Tarnovo, Stara Zagora, etc., other experts, public men and ordinary people. In 2002 the site was visited by Georgi Parvanov, President (Fig. 57), Simeon Saxkobergotski, Prime Minister (Fig. 58), Ognyan Gerdzhikov, Chairman of the National Assembly, and many other people. They all shared they were surprised by the high level of the Thracian under-tumular architecture and the



Thracian culture as a whole. Exhibitions for the results of the excavations were held in the premises of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, the Archaeological Institute with Museum, the National Assembly, in Plovdiv and elsewhere.

The Thracian temple in Chetinyova tumulus is hidden under a temporary preserving building and is guarded by armed security people. It can be visited any day (provided adequate weather conditions) and at any time of the year there is a qualified guide, which offers both competent information and color post cards, folders in Bulgarian and English, albums with information in some languages for the site and the excavations as well as souvenirs. On the other hand, the temple in Horizont tumulus is also open to be visited by tourists. It is located almost at the middle of the road going between the village and Chetinyova tumulus. There is an asphalt road to the temple. The temples are included in the itineraries of the German tourist giant TUI, Bulgarian company Balkantourist and many smaller travel companies.

Good asphalt roads and regular bus lines connect Starossel to Sofia, Plovdiv, Hissar and Karlovo. The village has got some cozy restaurants offering good service at affordable prices.

Georgi Kitov, Ph.D.

In 2000 and 2002 the Thracian Expedition for Tumular Investigations (TEMP), directed by Georgi Kitov Ph.D., investigated a majestic Thracian cult complex near Starossel. The finding was specified as 'archaeological event No. 1 for 2000'. Some people acknowledged it was the most valuable discovery in the history of the Thracian archaeology. The impressive temple in Chetinyova tumulus and the rich graves nearby are an additional evidence for the extraordinary artistic and technical possibilities of the Thracian society - the oldest people known by its name among those that used to live within the lands of Bulgaria. The region has got chances to turn into a first-class European tourist site.

Georgi Kitov
THRACIAN CULT CENTER NEAR STAROSSEL

Second expanded and revised edition

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Georgi Kitov, Stefan Dimov, Diana Dimitrova, photos
Peter Zhelev, computer design

Publishing house "SLAVENA" - Varna
59A, "Radko Dimitriev" Str., tel.:++359/52/602-465
e-mail: slavena@triada.bg
www.slavena.net

‘To Mr. Kitov and his team with gratitude and thankfulness for their efforts to discover and preserve such a historical monument.’

Georgi Parvanov - *President of the Republic of Bulgaria*

July 25, 2002.

‘I am extremely amazed by what I have seen in Starossel. It is beyond any doubt, this is a part of our cultural richness... I highly appreciate the efforts of all members of the excavations. Congratulations!’

Prof. Bozhidar Abrashev,

Cultural Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria. July 27, 2002.

‘I hope Bulgaria will finally be marked down on the map of the world cultural and historical tourism, of course, by means of our support.’

Neli Sandalska, *Balkantourist J.S.C. July 31, 2002.*

‘The rule of the last one or two decades that G. Kitov and his team ‘revise the Thracology science’ every archaeological season got proved once again.’

Prof. Alexander Fol

‘Absolutely!’

Valeriya Fol, Ph.D. *August 12, 2002.*

‘This is a unique monument. I wish that Starossel, this ‘pearl on the crown of Bulgaria’ gave yet new phenomenal results.’

Prof. N. Ovcharov, *August 24, 2002.*

‘I am happy I could have seen the new unique finding of Georgi Kitov’s team. I wish you every success!’

Prof. Vassil Nikolov, *August 24, 2002.*

‘With admiration and best wishes!’

Simeon Saxkoburggotski - *Prime Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria*

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